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SERMON

PREACHED

Before the Right Honourable

THE

Lord Mayor,

AND THE

COURT of ALDERMEN,

AT THE

Guild-Hall Chappel

On November the 23^d. 1684.

By THOMAS WAGSTAFFE, M.A.

LONDON,

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FOR MON

1823

of the Right Honorable

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Lord Mayor

AND

COURT OF ALDERMEN

AT THE

City Hall Chapel

On Monday the 24th 1823

BY THOMAS WAGSTON, M.A.

JOHN D. M.

Printed by J. D. M. at the City Hall Chapel

The Epistle Dedicatory.

To the Right Honourable
Sir JAMES SMITH, Kt.
Lord Mayor
Of the CITY of
LONDON,

And to the Honourable the
COURT of ALDERMEN.

THE Ends I aim'd at in this Discourse were, to do the Church right, to take off unreasonable Prejudices, and to perswade Men to the Communion of the best established Church in the World. And the same (I humbly presume) were intended by your Order for the publishing it: I do not apologize for the weakness

The Epistle Dedicatory.

ness (though I am conscious of it) your
Commands warrant its Publication; and
Obedience is part of the Religion of every
Member of the Church of England. I
therefore only add my Prayers, that God
would bless all Endeavours that tend to
the undeceiving the People, and settling
them in Unity, Peace and Loyalty; and
herein I become a Petitioner to God, not
only for your Lordship and the Honourable
Court (whose Undertakings in this kind
are very remarkable) but also for every
good Man in the Nation.

Your most Obedient and

Humble Servant,

Tho. Wagstaffe.

1. COR. 8. 12.

*When ye Sin so against the Brethren,
and offend their Weak Conscience, ye
Sin against Christ.*

AMONG other the Reproaches laid upon the Church of *England* by its Adversaries, one is that its Impositions are of a Scandalous Nature, that it enjoyns such things, as are offensive to Weak Brethren, and the very Words I have read to you are (tho ignorantly) yet petulantly enough applied to Charge the Church with Sin against Christ, in offending the Weak Consciences of the Brethren of the Separation; as if the imposing two or three Ceremonies, were as Injurious to tender minds now, as eating of Meat Sacrificed to Idols in the beginning of Christianity.

A Charge it is of a very high Nature, for seeing the power the Church is invested with, is for Edification, not Destruction: seeing it ought to have all Tenderneſs, and compassionate regards towards the little Ones in Christ, if (instead of this) she only lays stumbling Blocks in their way; the Church would

would be (what her Enemies have called her) an Adulterous Spouse of Christ, and which betrays the trust her Lord hath reposed in her, of forwarding the Salvation of all Men under her Care : But if those be the Representations only of Ignorance, or Design, if in truth (upon full Consideration) there appears no just Ground for such a Charge. It will not (I conceive) be unbecoming the filial Piety of a true Son, to vindicate the Innocence of his Mother, to wipe of those Aspersions which have been cast upon her, either by the Ignorant, or mistaken, or by the crafty and malicious. In order to this purpose, I shall endeavour to do these things following.

First, To state the Notion or Nature of Scandal or Offence, as it is represented to us in the Gospel.

2. To inquire whether those that urge this against us, are really offended in a Gospel Sense, tho' the things in controversie should be as evil as they represent them.

3. Suppose they were offended, yet these 2. things ought to be considered.

First. That this cannot with any Sense or Conscience be urged by them that are offended.

2. If the Matter of Offence be in things indifferent, we cannot forbear them upon account of a weak Brother, where our Liberty is already determined.

3. Tho' they are not offended by us, they are really offended by the Leaders of the Separation.

4. The Church of *England* hath given no Occasion of offence to any.

6. Briefly

3. Briefly apply this to our selves.

First, I shall endeavour to state the Notion or Nature of Scandal as it is represented in the Gospel, and in doing this I shall endeavour to consider the most important Cases mentioned in the new Testament : (from whence only we can have it) and from thence frame such a Notion as is agreeable to that Representation the Gospel makes of it.

There are two Cases largely spoken to by *St. Paul* in the Epistles, one is the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Chapters to the *Romans*, the other is the Eighth and Tenth Chapters of the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*. Both these I shall briefly consider.

Of that in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth to the *Romans*, the sum (I conceive) is this ; among the *Roman* Christians, there were several *Jewish* Converts ; who had not yet worn out the sence of *Moses's* Law but thought themselves, and all others also converted to Christianity (in some measure) under the binding power of it, as to the Observation of Days, Meats, &c. The Gentile Christians on the contrary, esteem'd themselves free from all such Observations, that these were no parts of the Gospel dispensation, that therefore neither they nor the *Jews* themselves ought to have any regard or account for them ; and this (as it usually happens in the differences of Parties and Opinions) made them Contemn and Censure each other, the Strong despising the Weak, as too nice and superstitious, and the Weak judging the Strong as prophane, and neglecters of Gods Law. And this was grown so high, that some of the weaker sort were hereby endangered ; and there were fears, the *Jews* might be discourag'd from Christia-

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nity, by unseasonably exploding those things, which they knew were of divine Institution; and which (tho abrogated) they had yet a Conscience for. In this Case the Apostle adviseth not to *judge one another but Judge this rather, that no man put a Stumbling Block, or an occasion to fall in his Brothers way* (Ver. 13.) the prejudices of Education and Customs (especially those that had such a Sanction as those of the *Jews*) would not be so soon worn out; and the severe insisting upon, or (which is worse) the reproachfully and contemptuously inveighing against them, would rather avert and hinder new proselytes (especially those of scrupulous and doubting minds) then any way engage them to another Doctrine, or way of Religion. The *Jews* had been Born, and Bred up under the Rites of *Moses*, and this was part of their Religion: And so soon as they had entered into Christianity, presently to fall foul upon *them*, or to treat them disdainfully and haughtily for using *them*; would be the readiest course to drive them away. And therefore, tho the thing be never so true, tho they were never so much convinc'd that the distinction of Days and Meats, &c. were wholly taken away by Christ, yet this ought to be mildly and meekly (at least) press'd in reference to those who had other persuasions concerning them, and who had not sufficient growth in Christianity, as to be fully instructed in the Nature and force of Christian Liberty. *I know (saith he) and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of it self, but to him that esteemeth any thing unclean, to him it is unclean* (Ver. 14.) altho as to the things themselves, I have a free Liberty, and may follow my own
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Sentiments, yet I am to have respect, as well to my Brothers weakness, as to my own freedom, and (because he thinks otherwise) if by any indiscreet or uncharitable use of this Liberty, I offend him, and occasion him, that is not so fully perswaded, to fall away from the faith, I ought not to make use of it. *If thy Brother be grieved with thy Meat, now walkest thou not Charitably, Destroy not him with thy Meat for whom Christ dyed,* (ver. 15.)

And this I take to be the Summ of this matter, so far as it relates to the case of Scandal, and of which (for the present) I shall desire only to remark this one thing,

That the means whereby the weak Brethren were really (or likely to be) offended (in the Case I have recited) were reproaching and despising the Ceremonies of the *Jews*, tho they were really abrogated, and Contemning and Slighting the weaker Christians that us'd them.

From whence we may briefly infer (for I shall make no further use of it) that Villifying and scorning Ceremonies, and them that use them, may as equally be an occasion of scandal as imposing them. And *St. Paul* himself took such care in this matter, that rather then offend the *Jews* he actually comply'd with a Mosaical Rite, and Circumcis'd *Timothy*. He had (it seems) another opinion of Christian Liberty, than the stiff men of Separation; they think their Liberty invaded by Impositions, and they ought not to yield to their Governors, because Christ hath made them free, and yet *St. Paul* (by vertue of his Christian Liberty) not to offend them he was among, could use an abrogated Rite, and such a one as Christ did

unquestionably free us from. But some men have an odd and perverse Notion of things? They think they have Christian Liberty enough to break all the Laws and Injunctions of their Governours, but they are straight lac'd, and can find no Christian Liberty to comply with them, and obey them, and this is the difference between Saint *Paul* and them, Saint *Paul's* Christian Liberty gave him a Latitude, and he could do any thing that was not Sin, for somewhat less ends then obedience to Magistrates; Circumcision he knew in it self, was neither necessary, nor Convenient, yet he did use it for the sake and satisfaction of those people, but our Libertines cry out they shall betray their Liberty in doing any thing they do not like, and they will not go a Haires breadth tho it be to obey their Rulers, and to promote the Churches peace. But this only by the way.

The second place the Apostle insists on in reference to the offending our weak Brother, is that from whence the Text is chosen, and it is spoken to in the Eighth and Tenth Chapters, of the First Epistle to the *Corinthians*, and the Case I take to be this. Some thought it lawful to eat Meat offered to Idols, and the Reason they gave for it was, because an Idol is nothing, and so could not convey any Stain or Pollution to the Meat offer'd to it, that which was nothing could not infect Gods real Creatures: But since he appointed them for our use, and support, we might freely and indifferently use them for these ends, whether they were, or were not sacrificed to Idols; for why should that which was nothing debar a Man of a Right which God had given him? To this St. *Paul* answers by granting the Reason that
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it's true, an Idol is nothing, and there is no God but one, and therefore as to the things themselves they might Eat, or not Eat, as they found themselves disposed: But there were some accidental Considerations, which might make it unlawful, and inexpedient, and those were tho not as to the things themselves, yet in reference to their Brethren. *For some with Conscience of the Idol unto this Hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an Idol, that is, they take it as consecrated Meat, and part of the Idol Worship, and their Conscience being weak is defiled (Ver. 7.)* those that had been newly converted from Idolatry, were not so fully weaned from their old Opinions and Customs; but they had (as is usual in all changes) some kind of Sence and Apprehension towards their former Modes of Worship, and might the sooner be brought to relapse; and when they saw them that were confirmed, or Eminent Christians doing the same things that Idolaters do, they might be perswaded that Idolatry was not so Vain a thing, and they, who had yet some kind of Conscience towards an Idol, might be induced to do the same, and so be brought back to Idolatry, from which they had but lately escaped. *For if any Man see thee which hast Knowledg sit at Meat in the Idols Temple, shall not the Conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to eat these things that are offered to Idols, and by that means, having not the same Sence and estimate of things, be made a formal Idolator, and through thy Knowledg shall the weak Brother perish for whom Christ dyed? (ver. 10. 11.)* If therefore the Liberty a knowing Christian hath, be thus perversely used, as to become a stumbling block to the Weak, If this know-

knowledge of having a power to eat any of Gods Creatures, be not directed by Love and Charity. It is a sinful abusing the priviledges Christ hath purchased, and instead of complying with, is a direct Violation of his Will; *But when ye so Sin against the Brethren, and wound their weak Conscience, ye Sin against Christ,* (Ver. 12.)

And this, I conceive, is the sum, and full import of this place, and from these two places I have mentioned, we may take a full account of the Nature of Scandal, from hence are two things remarkable.

First, That a *Weak Brother* (in a Gospel Sense) is such a one, as has been newly converted to Christianity, and who (for want of Time, Consideration, or Instruction) is not sufficiently confirm'd in the Principles of it: 'Tis such a one, whose Christianity as yet hangs loose; 'tis new, and unsettled, he hath yet some kind of Conscience, and tendency of mind to his former Ways, and so he is apt to stagger, to be carried away by Temptations, and easily to be driven back. His Religion is (as it were) pendulous, and any thing turns the Scales. Fair, and gentle, and prudent Behaviour may win him to a further embracing the Faith; but inconsiderate, indiscreet, and uncharitable Methods may run him again into his former Errours, and this was plainly the Case of the Weak Persons in the places I have considered, and this I take to be the true Notion of a Weak Brother: and I do not think there is any other Notion of it in the whole Gospel. And such Persons as these, every good Man will think it reasonable, to treat with all the Gentleness, Yielding and Com-

Complyableness possible. To submit to their infirmity, and as Saint *Paul* speaks, to become every thing to them, that he might save them.

But what is this to those amongst us? Is there no difference between the Case of new Converts and those Born and Bred up in Christianity? Who have suck'd in the principles of Religion with their milk, who have always liv'd under the power of it, and have had time and opportunities more then sufficient, for conviction, information and instruction? If such as those will be always Babes, if their Faith be so unsettled still, such weakness is not only a great shame, but I fear, when all hearts are try'd, will appear not weakness but wilfulness.

Besides, what hath the Case of weakness to do with those, who as King *James* speaks are *not only Strong, but Head-Strong*, who are obstinately wedded to Foolish and unreasonable opinions, whom nothing of Lenity can win, nothing of reason can satisfy; are these to be entertain'd with the same tenderness that belongs to a weak Brother? Weakness indeed is but obstinacy, and stiffness in error was never thought an argument of compassion and sufferance. Our Saviour himself, and his Apostles, who always condescended to Weakness, yet vigorously and Zealously oppos'd themselves against perverseness, and stubbornness.

*Conference at
Hampton Court.*

2. Hence we see that Scandal or offending a Weak Brother, is no less then perverting him from Christianity, and therefore we find in all places cited, that when he is offended, he is said to be destroy'd and made perish: This is plainly the meaning of being offended here. And the being hindred from believing

ving in Christ, or being induc'd to forsake that Belief afterwards, is the sence of most (if not all) of the places of the New Testament where the words Scandal or Offence are named, I shall need to instance but in two or three. In the *Thirteenth* Chapter of Saint *Matthew* in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, that is, as our Saviour himself interprets it, himself, and his Doctrine at ver. 20, 21. 'tis said, *He that receiveth the Seed in Stony places, is he that beareth the Word, and with joy receiveth it, but he hath not Root; for when Tribulation, or Persecution, cometh because of the Word, by and by he is offended*, that is, by Reason of Tribulation, and Persecution, which follow upon the profession of the Christian Faith he forsakes it. So Saint *Matthew* 18th. Chapter ver. 6. *Whosoever shall offend one of these little Ones that believe in me*, that is, shall make them leave the Profession, or Practice of my Faith. So when the *Jews* are said to be *offended* at Christ, they were through their own misconceptions and prejudices hindred from believing on him; so then *being offended* is not so light a thing as some make of it, 'tis not being angry or displeased, but such a thing whereby their Religion is endangered, and they are thereby discourag'd either from embracing, or continuing in Christianity.

Now this is matter of a very high Nature, and it is no Wonder that the Gospel, which takes so much care for the Salvation of all Men, should (as much as may be) endeavour to prevent the loss of any, Charity is the Summ of our Religion as to God, so also to our Brother, and 'tis a duty incumbent on all, both upon the account of God, of their Christianity and of their Neighbour, to propagate and spread it,
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and to use all fair means that others may entertain it, as well as our selves. If therefore, by any behaviour of ours, there is bred a dislike and averſion, and our Brother falls away from Chriſt, we betray our Saviour, we hinder his deſign and end in coming, and we contradict the Fundamental Principle of Chriſtian Religion. Theſe are things therefore of the higheſt concernment, and it is no wonder our Saviour and the Apoſtle gives ſuch ſevere Rules and Injunctions concerning them. The Salvation of a man is of high importance: 'Twas that for which Chriſt died; and his Religion is the way to it. 'Tis no harſh order therefore, *That we ſhould by all means take care, that our Liberty is not a Stumbling Block to them that are Weak,* (1 Cor. 8. 9.) And the Apoſtle profeſſes for himſelf, that if Meat make his Brother to offend, he will eat none while the World ſtandeth, that is, he will do nothing that is in his power to forbear, rather than hazard the loſs of his Brothers Soul; and truly he muſt have mean thoughts of Chriſtian Charity, and of Mans Salvation, that will not deny himſelf a great many lawful Freedoms rather than his Brothers Salvation ſhall be hazarded, and he be occaſion'd to forſake Chriſtianity.

And this I take to be the true Notion of Scandal as it is ſtated in the Goſpel, and concerning which thoſe Rules, and Directions of not offending our Brother were made. I confeſs there are Scandals of an inferior Nature, and in which Senſe Divines generally handle this Subject, and that is when our Behaviour occasions our Brother not to forſake the whole, but to break any part of our Religion and fall into Sin, and this tho' it be true, yet there is a great difference

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in degree and malignity, the great Scandal is that which is so much spoken to, and those things and prescriptions (I have mention'd) tho they may also in proportion be binding in reference to the lesser ones, yet I conceive they are chiefly intended, and do primarily relate to the greater; tho they may be Rules for our Behaviour, and are to be so with Respect to any Sin of our Brother, yet their first and chiefest Respect is in reference to his Total defection of Christianity.

To comprehend the whole therefore, A Weak Brother is offended, when by any uncharitable behaviour, imprudent use of liberty, or other means, he is driven away from Christianity, or occasion'd to violate any part of it; for tho (as I said) the Rules the Gospel gives of not offending, have the first and chiefest regard, and were mainly (if not only) intended to secure such from falling from the Christian Faith, yet by Analogy and Parity of Reason they may have Respect to prevent likewise their falling into any Sin, and here the argument is good from the greater to the less; for if it be a Scandal to drive a man from Christianity in the Whole, 'tis so (tho in an inferior degree) to occasion him to forsake any Part of it. The Reason and Ground of these Rules was that thereby Salvation was hazarded, and a Man's Salvation is in danger (tho not equally nor so much) by his falling into Sin, as by his leaving Christian Religion. This is the first, the Nature of Scandal: but I shall endeavour to inquire into matters of Fact, whether they that urge this objection are really offended in a Gospel sense, for whether any reasonable Man can believe so, granting that the things are as bad,

bad as they represent them. I shall not here enter into Men's Consciences, to their own Judge they stand or fall. But the ground of this inquiry is this. They are always quarrelling at our Ceremonies, always angry at and displeas'd with them, and nothing we can do can perswade them to an approbation of them. Now this (which they take to be their offence) is an undeniable Argument against it, and so long as they continue in that mind, they are not only not offend- ed, but it is impossible they should be so. For sup- pose there was that real evil in them, which they ei- ther do, or make us believe they think there is; the imposing them by the Church, or the using them our- selves, what inconvenience soever they may bring to us, can never hazard them, who run from them as far as they are able. Let our Ceremonies be as Anti-Christian and Idolatrous as they would have them, what harm is that to those, who will not so much as touch them with one of their Fingers? Had these People too great an opinion of Ceremonies, were they apt to worship and adore them, and should our just and decent use of them bring them to this, they would indeed be offended, tho we had not given the occasion. But now to scorn and hate them, to vilifie and reproach them, and all that use them, and yet cry out they are offended at them, is a contra- diction. In the Case of Meat offer'd to Idols, the Strong are forbidden to eat, not because the weak Brother is angry, or displeas'd with so doing, but for fear he should be too well pleas'd with it, that is, should like it so well as to do it himself, and it was not because they had an ill opinion, but too good opinion of an Idol, for as yet they had Conscience

towards the Idol, and might be emboldened to eat it as part of the Idol Worship. Their *Weakness* consisted in having too good thoughts of these things, and therefore they should be forborn, lest they should esteem them yet more, and so be confirm'd in, or return'd to Idolatry. And (in this Sense) if our Brethren were offended, they should then frequent our Assemblies, and Idolize our Ceremonies, and Esteem them holier than we do our selves. But when they revile and clamour against them; when they deride and scoff at them, if there should be any hurt in them, these (of all Men) are not like to be spoiled by our Example: tho kneeling at the Sacrament should be Idolatry, and the Surplis, and Common-Prayer downright Popery; yet the Christianity of such cannot be endangered by them. For how can they be poluted, and their weak Consciences wounded by any thing they will not use? These People therefore think they are offended, only because they are angry and vexed, and who can help it? such things will be, so long as there are peevish, unquiet, and troublesome Natures in the World; but surely they ought not to hinder the Church from injoyning, or us from using any thing that is decent and useful. Nay, this is so far from being a Scandal, or any Inducement for us to forbear these things, that upon this very account, and for their sakes, we ought to be more Zealous and Earnest in them, if by any means we might bring them to some Conscience of these things; if our careful discharge of our Duty might win upon them, and they seeing our good works might be brought to a just regard for Authority, and a right esteem.

esteem for the Peace and Union of the Church. For those that for matter of Rites can separate and divide, have too mean Esteem of Unity and Obedience, and while they see us loose and careless in our Duty, it will be apt to confirm them in their Error. The Weakness of our Brethren plainly consists in too much slighting Decency and Ceremonies, and too little regard for Authority. And an indifferency, coldness, or complying with them will nourish their mistakes, will confirm them in their ill grounded Opinion, and really offend them.

There is one Objection to this, and that is, That tho they should not be offended in Reference to the use of the Ceremonies, because they do not use them, yet the Ceremonies being imposed by the Church, and they having such an Aversion to them, are thereby prejudic'd against our Communion, and so want the means of Salvation that is amongst us, and by that means they may, tho not by the other, be offended. This Objection I do not know that it is urged by any of them, nor indeed can it well be by those who think they have purer Ordinances, and purer Ways of Worship. But what weight there is in this Objection, and how far the Church in its Impositions may have regard to the Prejudices of People, and whether this will relate to the Case of our present Dissenters, will be spoke to under another Head.

3. Supposing they are really offended, yet however these two things ought to be considered.

First, That this cannot with any Sense or Conscience be used by them that are offended.

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2. If the matter of Offence be in things indifferent, we cannot forbear them upon the account of a weak Brother, where our Liberty is already determin'd.

First, That this cannot with any Sence or Conscience be urged by them that are offended: I know they think they say something, when they say they are offended, but whatsoever it may be against us, to be sure it is nothing for themselves: For they do not consider that to be offended is a Sin, as well as to offend, and the weak Brother that falls is in as much danger, as he that makes him: For a Scandal becomes a Sin, no otherwise, than as it hath Relation to other Mens Sins, and if it be a Sin in the remote Occasion, 'tis certainly so in the immediate Actor. He that causes a man to forsake his Duty, (which is the Gospel Scandal) is guilty of, and punishable for the Scandal, and he that does it, is guilty of, and punishable for the Transgression of Gods Law: In short, if it be a Sin to entice, to tempt, or to provoke to Sin, 'tis certainly not less to act, and to perform it, and therefore we read in the Scandals the Gospel speaks of; These that were offended were not so very Innocent, nor in a very hopeful Condition. But they are said to be lost, to perish, and to be destroyed. And now is not this a hopeful Argument? and can any man use it that is really offended? all that he says must rebound upon himself, and every clamour against us flies in his own Face, for it is certainly a Duty not to be scandaliz'd, as well as not to scandal; and if they are offended, and are sensible of it, they Sin knowingly; and if they know it, why do they not re-

remove their Offences, and forbare to Sin? For tis certainly a very strange thing, for Men perpetually to cry out, They are in a fault, and yet never take care to mend it. But the truth is, the Men that talk at this rate, do not know what they say, they take their own unreasonable Frets, and Discontents for Offence, which notwithstanding in the Gospel-sense is quite contrary.

2. If the Matter of Offence be in things, Indifferent in their Nature, where our Liberty is already determined, we cannot forbare them, tho our weak Brother should thereby be offended. And this is our Case, the things in Controversie we believe to be of an indifferent Nature, and such as are in our Superiours Power to impose, and when lawful Authority hath interposed, we are no longer free, and the things which are indifferent in their Nature, are not now indifferent in their use, we are under the binding Power of the Law, and are obliged to observe them, by Virtue of those Injunctions which command us to submit our selves to the Powers set over us. And now (in this Case) what would they have us to do? would they have us despise Authority, and break thro the Laws? this perhaps might please and satisfy them; but sure they do not expect we should wound our own Consciences to heal theirs, that we should Sin our selves to prevent Sin in them. For (if they do not,) we do believe we are bound in Conscience to obey our Governours in all things Lawful: the things that occasion'd the Scandal the Apostle speaks of, were as yet left undetermin'd, and they might as well omit, as use them. But 'tis not so with us, we are tyed up by Laws, and there-

therefore if our Brethren should be offended, we may be sorry, but we cannot help it : We may wish they were more Judicious and Understanding, than to be scandaliz'd at Innocent Rites, and we may take all the Care we can to inform them better ; but we must not therefore forbear them, and disobey our Rulers ; we may have all Tenderneſs and Charity for them. But Charity begins at home : we cannot out of Love to them ruin our ſelves, and neglect our Duty, and make other Mens miſtakes the Rule of our Conſciences. And this is the third Thing,

4. I ſhall endeavour to make out, that tho they are not offended by us, yet they are really offended by the Leaders of the Separation. And this will retort the Argument upon themſelves : For this purpoſe I ſhall need only to remind you, That the formal Nature of Scandal is ſuch a Behaviour of ours, as whereby our Brother is lead into Sin. And to make this good againſt the Heads of the Separation I ſhall preſume, and take for granted theſe three Things.

Fiſt, That Obedience to Governours in all Lawful Things is a Duty.

2. That Separation from a Lawful Communion, from a Church whereof we are National Members, and wherein we may Communicate without Sin, is a Sin.

3. That the Church of *England* is ſuch a Church. Theſe three (which might eaſily be made out) but would take up too much time for the preſent Diſcourſe, and which I muſt now therefore take for granted. But they being granted it will follow, that thoſe Perſons, who
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entice them from their Obedience, and who lead them into Schism, are the persons that really offend them, (*i. e.*) these are the Men that Occasion them to Sin. Those therefore that lead them into Conventicles, and teach them to despise Dominion, and speak evil of Dignities, those that make them believe two or three Ceremonies are as heavy as the Moisaical Yoke, that by calling hard Names, as *Antichrist*, and *Baal's Priests*, fright and scare poor People from our Communion; these are they that offend them, that is, who make them Sin, and pervert them from their Duty. Where therefore they learn to be proud and untractable, to be Factious and Schismatical, to be Seditious and Ungovernable, there it is they must lay their Offence. And if it be seriously enquired into, whence it is that these Men have taken such an ill and Unrighteous Opinion concerning us, and the things we use, as to believe the Communicating with us will pollute and defile them, this cannot be in the things themselves, and 'tis some what odd, that Men should believe the Church of *England* is Popishly given, which notwithstanding is, (and any man may know it that will) the chiefest support of Protestantism, and the greatest Bulwark against Popery in the World; 'tis strange that Men in their wits should think, that whining and sighing, that undigested thoughts, and crude, (not to say nonsensical) Expressions, should be the Spirit of Prayer, and more fit to express the Necessities of a Congregation, than these that have been deliberately pen'd by the most Judicious and Godly in a Nation: I say, whence is it, that Men take up such Unrighteous Estimates? there

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is not one of a thousand of them that ever examined the truth of things, or have any thing to say besides some scurrilous Expressions; they take them upon trust, and swallow down every thing their Leaders dictate, and so they become offended, and separate from us, and fly from our Communion, And so long as they are made to believe, that when we kneel at the receiving the Communion, we are Idolaters, that the Cross in Baptism is making new Sacraments, that when they Communicate with us, they shall joyn themselves to a Company of *Jews, Heathens, or Papists*; these Men indeed are offended; but woe be to them by whom such Offences come, who raise up Bug-bears, and scare-Crows, and drive Christian People from what they are bound in Conscience to do; these therefore that make them divide and separate; that are always railing at an Innocent Church, that feed their prejudices, and whet their Discontents, that insinuate into the injudicious, unstable, and unsettled; these (how much soever they may humour and please them.) Are in truth the Persons that offend them, that is, that withdraw them from their Duty, and Occasion them to Sin. For,

5. The Church of *England* hath upon no account given Occasion of Offence to any, she hath not done any thing that may Discourage any Honest Man in the way of his Salvation. But hath used all means to set up the Kingdom of Christ, and to promote the Interest of Souls. Her Doctrines are the same with the Gospel, and the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints, she hath preserved pure, and deliver'd uncorrupted to her Children. And those who

who are offended at these, would likewise be offended at Christ, if he was alive. But this I shall not now need to insist upon, it being not denyed by any, except the wildest sort of Separatists. But doth she not give Milk with one Breast, and Poyson with the other? tho' her Doctrines be pure, yet the Liturgy and Ceremonies she imposes may pollute and defile our Consciences. And this might be something, if our Ceremonies were Numerous and Cumberfome, if they were a Clog and Impediment to Piety and Devotion, if they were invented, and set up by our Church, and not used by the best Christians in Ancient Times; But if they are, for their number, few; for their Nature, fit and apt to promote Religion and God's Worship: If they have been used by the Primitive and early Christians, then they cannot in Reason offend: And why should the Common Prayer, and the Sign of the Cross corrupt us, which did very well agree, with the Consciences of the best and purest Christians? But that which I shall chiefly insist on, is comprehended in these three Things.

First, That the Methods the Church proceeded with in these Things upon the Reformation, seem'd most proper to prevent Offences.

2. That the Things she hath retain'd are Decent and Useful, apt to advance Religion and Gods Worship, and to secure it from Irreverence and Profanation, and therefore might reasonably be enjoin'd for the benefit of a Religious Society, tho' some Persons of that Society might mistake them, or not approve them.

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3. That

3. That she hath taken all possible Care to satisfy ev'n the most Scrupulous, of her Innocency, and the cleerness of her Intentions in imposing them, and so hath used all reasonable ways to take off Prejudices and Offences, and hath in all things (as much as the thing would admit) condescended to the weakest, and most infirm in Faith, or Understanding.

And these three being made out, it will appear, that the Church is so far from being Occasion of offending the Weak, that she hath exercised all possible Lenity and Tenderneſs towards them.

First, That the Methods the Church proceeded with in these things upon the Reformation, seemed most proper to prevent Offences, and that was when she excluded all things that were Novel, Sinful, and tiresome, and retain'd what was of undoubted Antiquity, easie, and useful. And this, (whatsoever some hot Men may think) was certainly the easiest course that could be taken to prevent Offences on all Hands. Had there been more, and more troublesome kept, those that complain now, might have Reason to be offended? Had all been thrown away, as well the useful as others, a contrary Party might have been offended, and when they saw us reform from what was convenient, they might have esteem'd the whole Reformation not just and necessary, but peevish or politick, and carry'd on for other ends besides Religion and the Salvation of Soule. I know this kind of reasoning will not down with some, and a man shall hardly escape from being call'd a Papist for urging it. But for all that, since 'tis necessary the Church should open its Arms to receive all, since the
Apostle

Apostle enjoyns, to give no offence, neither to the Jew, nor to the Gentile; it was (especially at that time when a Nation was to be converted from the dregs of *Poperie*) not only the Wisdom, and Moderation, but the Christianity too of the first Reformers to carry things with so much evenness and indifference; as not to please the Fury and Heats of the one Hand, nor the Errors and Faults on the other: And this took away a great many Offences, which were and still are objected against Reformation in other places. And when they saw that we did not throw away the Mettle with the Dross, that we did not cast off things profitable with the unprofitable, it was a plain Evidence, that the end of the Reformation was Truth, not Design; that what was aimed at was not Opposition, Contradiction, or Interest, but only to establish and set up the Purity of the Gospel. And this just and equal Dealing, was the most prudent and Conscientious course that could be taken to prevent offences, and a great many were by this means brought into the Church (for most of the Nation was converted) who in all probability, by other Furious Methods, by cutting up Root and Branch (as they call it) by destroying every thing then in use, how useful soever, would have been offended, that is, they would have been discouraged, and rather have kept to their old superstitions, than have entred into a Church which Acted so Unreasonably.

I know it is said, that this Method was proper enough in the Infant state of Reformation when mens minds were yet hankering after Ceremonies and they could not so soon be wean'd from their old Dotages,
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and therefore it might then be necessary to comply with them, for fear of driving them quite away from us. But it is not so now, a thorow Reformation would be more fit and suitable; men are now grown more wise and understanding, and know that these things are vain and empty, Superstitious and Ridiculous, and therefore I affirm,

2. The things retain'd are decent and useful, &c. There are but Three or Four things about which all this stir is made, as the Surplis, and Liturgy, the Cross in Baptism, and Kneeling at the Communion: Each of which notwithstanding is fit and proper. Let any unprejudic'd man consider, whether a Decent and Solemn way of Worship is not apt to impress Reverence on mens minds, and whether distinction of Habits do's not contribute to the Solemnity. It plainly does so in Magistrates and Judges, and no Mortal man can give a Reason, why it should not have the same influence in Religious as well as Civil things. Is not Gods worship like to be better secur'd from indecency, mistake and miscarriage, by prescribed Rules, than by leaving the Modes to every giddy mans fancy and opinion? Is not a form of words, where the matter is maturely thought on, and every expression well weigh'd, more fit to excite Devotion, more suitable to express the peoples wants and desires, than rash, inconsiderate, and hasty thoughts, than idle, intemperate, and ridiculous expressions? Is not the Cross, the Badg of our Christian profession? And when we are Baptiz'd into Christ's Death, is it not fit we should be minded of it? That we now take up the Cross, and are to be Crucify'd to the World, that we should not be asham'd

alham'd of a Crucify'd Saviour, but own and profess his Religion in spite of all opposition. When Men worship God, and Commemorate infinite blessings, is it not fit this should be done in the humblest posture? That therefore when we praise, and return thanks to God and our Saviour, and are partakers of his Body and Blood, we rather Kneel, then behave ourselves as his equals, or as if we had been at a bodily entertainment with one of our Neighbours.

These things are plain and obvious at the first sight, as very proper and expedient for the more orderly and comely carrying on of Gods Worship. And this is the first thing to be inquir'd into as to the imposition of any thing, whether they are fit for the purposes they are intended, and if they are, then there is sufficient Reason for the commanding them, tho some Persons should not like them, or should fall into inconvenience by them, and the Reason is because the end of Laws is the good of the Society, and if the good of the greatest part is thereby promoted, it justifies and warrants such Impositions: Now the Power the Church is invested with is for Edification, and if it enjoyns such things as are apt to edify, if it belongs to her to look after Gods service, and if what she hath ordain'd tends to the more due and Solemn performance of the things of Religion, to make men, at their Worship Reverent and Devout, and to prevent them from being vain, light, and impudent, then there is great Reason for the imposing these things, tho some Persons should be offended at them; there could never any Laws be made, if every Mans dislikes or offences were to be first consulted

*Bona res
neminem
scandalifi-
cant nisi
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mentem.
Tertul. de
veland.
virginib.*

ted the best things will offend some, *Tertullian* saith, *Good things offend none but the Evil*, Humility and Charity offend the proud and the covetous, Unity and Peace are not agreeable to the turbulent and factious. Neither will the Laws enjoyning Decency, Order, and Uniformity be pleasing to them, who love Distraction, Slovenliness, and Irreverence in Gods Worship.

3. The Church hath taken all possible care to give all Satisfaction of Innocence and clearness in her injunctions, and so hath done (what lay in her) to take off all unreasonable prejudices and offences against them. If some have taken mistakes and misapprehensions, if she hath taken all care to rectifie those mistakes, if they will still be offended, the Church is by no means chargeable with those offences, she hath taken so much pains to remove. And herein the Charity and Condescension of the Church of *England* is very Remarkable; there is not one of those things which have been objected against her, but have been answered with all possible Clearness and Satisfaction, and there hath been all care taken fully to inform them of the clearness of her intentions, for instance, she hath declar'd over and over, that she places no Holiness in Vestments, nor in any other Ceremonies, only she useth them for Decency, Edification, and out of a due respect to Antiquity. That the Cross in Baptism is not a new Sacrament, that it is not, nor ever was intended by her as any addition to Christs institution, but only as a convenient initiating Rite into the Church. That by enjoyning Kneeling at the Communion, she doth not intend any adoration of the Bread and Wine, but only a suitable gesture for the purposes

purposes we are about at that Sacrament: And the like may be said of every other thing that is cavill'd at. And now if after these full and often Declarations they are resolv'd they will not believe them, nor examine the Truth of them; if they are still resolv'd to be mistaken, their mistakes are Obstinate and willful, and it is not in the Churches power to help it, she hath done all she can do, they may, if they will be still offended and fly from our Communion, but surely it can never with any Reason be said, the Church hath occasioned them so to do. And this is the Fifth thing.

6. I shall endeavour, briefly to apply this to our Practice.

First, Let us with Zeal and Vigor assert the Constitutions of the Church notwithstanding the mistakes, or pretended offences of ignorant or ill meaning Men. I would not be so mistaken, as if I had not all the Charity for every honest man, tho he is mistaken: But surely it does not become us to feed their mistakes, and for want of acquainting them with their Duty, to suffer them to continue in error all their lives long: the more Charity we have for them, the greater care we shall take to instruct them, and to win them from the Error of their ways. When therefore we are Mealy Mouth'd, or (which is worse) when by any unworthy compliances we yeild to them, or connive at them, we humour their Errors and really offend them.

2. Let us be careful of our Conversation that as the Church hath not, so we may give no occasion of offence. Innocent Ceremonies are not, but ill lives are offensive, vice was always Scandalous; and if this

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way we pervert any, we are responsible for the offences we cause. Our Follies will reflect upon the Church ; those who never examin'd it's principles, will be apt to think her as vitious, as our selves, that she connives at those Crimes her Members commit. I know 'tis not reasonable from the Sins of Professors to argue evil of the Religion : But since the whole World is Govern'd more by Example, then direction, it will certainly concern us, for the Churches sake, and for our own, that we do not justly occasion men to speak evil of her, or of us. There is not a vice the Church of *England* tolerates, nor a vertue that it doth not encourage to, and yet (we may remember) the irregularities of some particular Members was made an objection against the whole Church, every Error, or Looseness in a Member was made the fault of the Church. And so it is still, our Mother will be wounded through our sides, every disorder we commit will be an Argument against her, and a discouragement from her Communion ; we may Reason for ever ; but if we do not live too, we shall never gain Men to our Church ; Reason is an abstruse thing and all have not Faculties ; but bad manners are obvious, and every man hath talent enough to know ; our Sins therefore will hinder more then our perswasions can draw, and those that can never answer our Arguments, will yet gain Ground by our Vices ; and here truly we are beholding to our Adversaries, they will be sure to mind us of our Faults and sometimes when there is no Ground, and think by charging us to discharge themselves even from far greater Sins : But our faults will not make them Innocent ; and an Irregular behaviour in a Church-Member will

will not justifie *Pride*, and *Faction*, and *Schism* in a Seperatist. Nor yet will their disorders acquit ours, nor will ours be less because theirs are greater. What I shall therefore recommend is, that whereas they cannot speak against us as *Rebels*, *Schismatics*, *Seditious*, *Turbulent*, and *unquiet*, we may take care they shall not justly charge us with any other vice: For let us do what we can, they will speak evil of us, which we cannot help, but we can help, and let us take care, that they do not do it justly, but as the Apostle saith, (1 Pet. 2. 12.) *Let us have our Conversation Honest among them, that whereas they speak against us as evil-doers, they may be our good Works, which they shall behold glorify God in the Day of Visitation.*

F I N I S.
